

CLASSICAL GUITAR

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L to R: Celso Cano, Diana Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Mesut Özgen, Celil Refik Kaya

Muriel Anderson, Celil Refik Kaya, Celso Cano Highlight 2nd Miami GuitART Festival

APRIL 10, 2017

By Dr. Sam Desmet

From February 20–26, 2017, the [Miami International GuitArt Festival](http://www.migf.org/) once again took place at the Florida International University. In its second year, the festival expanded with two extra days of concerts, master classes, lectures and its luthier exhibition.

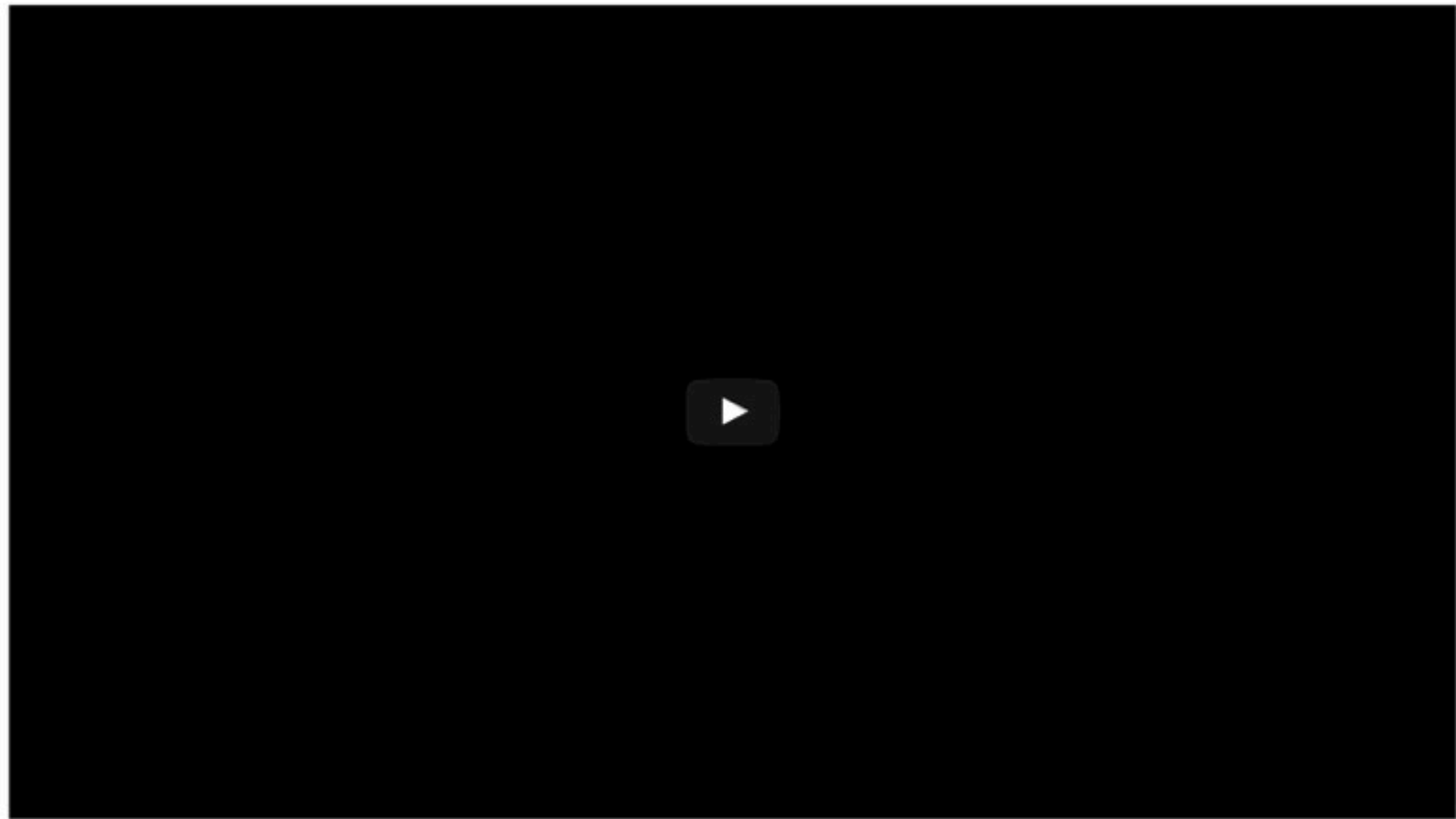
Prior to the festival, a request was sent out to composers to write a piece for solo guitar. Hachè Costa's percussive *Omaggio to Federico García Lorca* won this year's composition competition and honorable mention was given to Eric Verbugt's *Three Quarks for Muster Mark!*

Artistic Director and festival founder [Mesut Özgen](http://www.mesutozgen.com/) performed the premiere of the winning piece during the opening concert. Özgen's former student [Celso Cano](https://www.celsocano.com/) joined the stage to form a duet, playing *L'Encouragement* by Fernando Sor and some of Len Williams' highly under-programmed arrangements. Both Özgen and Cano premiered some of their own music, as well, which proved to be of high compositional quality.

The second day, Felipe Carvajal and friends played a flamenco set of compositions by Gerardo Nuñez, Paco de Lucía and Mayte Martín. Carvajal also persuaded audiences with some of his own tangos and bulerías. Similar to last year's performance, audiences interacted with the musicians in a unique way only flamenco can inspire.

On Wednesday, lutenist and FIU Professor of Musicology David Dolata gave a sneak-peek behind the scenes of the *Encyclopedia of Tablature*, to be released in the fall. For years now, together with an international team of leading experts, Dolata worked on this unique and comprehensive reference source on tablature. Surely this will be an edition any serious transcriber or scholar will want to get his or her hands on.

On the same day, as an introduction to a concert paying tribute to Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968), the composer's granddaughter, Diana, enlightened the audience with anecdotes and historical background of the master. Raffaele Livio Ponti conducted the FIU Symphony Orchestra performing Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Concerto in D*, with soloist [Celil Refik Kaya](http://www.celilrefikkaya.com/)'s technical and musically refined playing greatly enhancing this monumental piece. For the second half of the concert, guitarist Celso Cano's warm and round tone carried and supported the mixed choir through all seven movements of Tedesco's *Romancero Gitano*.



Intriguing musical harmonies mesmerized many of us during the [Microtonal Guitar Duo](http://www.tolgahancogulu.com/en/microtonal-guitar-duo/) concert on Thursday. Unlike in the music of Bartók, the micro-tunings of ancient folk tunes were kept intact but were often re-harmonized by Tolgahan Çoğulu (adjustable-fret-guitar) and Sinan Cem Eroğlu (fretless guitar). The tone for this concert was actually set during their workshop, where music students used tape and small metal strips to add extra frets to their regular guitars, before reading through some Turkish scales (*makam*) and tunes.

[Kenny Hill](http://www.hillguitar.com/) has been building guitars for over 40 years. It all started with a \$200 tool set and an excuse to find a "real" job, as he jokingly mentioned during his lecture. Playing his guitars, one quickly realizes the experience is reflected in his instruments through sound quality, projection, playability and the high level of craftsmanship. In the hands of players such as Evan Hirschelman, all of the instruments' potential comes to the surface, which the audience absorbed during Saturday's concert. The guitars of Kenny Hill and Orlando-based luthier [Robert Desmond](http://www.desmondguitars.com/) were on display at the luthier exhibition over the weekend.

Celil Refik Kaya's solo recital on Friday evening opened with Mauro Giuliani's *Sonata Eroica*, followed by a fluent and expressive interpretation of Granados' *Valses Poeticos*. Not only is Kaya a skilled player and transcriber, his own *Sonatina in D*, which reminded me of Ralph Towner's work, marked a deep understanding of composition as well. A nice surprise came at the end, as pianist Sinan Çayır joined in for a piece called *In Honor of Lou Harrison*, composed by Özgen, who combined a special *usul* (Turkish rhythmic mode) and *makam* (Turkish melodic mode) made up by Lou Harrison, together with another *makam bestenigar* by Turkish-Moldavian composer Cantemir, to create an unusually charming soundscape, performed brilliantly in juxtaposed rhythms by Kaya and Çayır.

Guitarist [Arthur Dente](http://arthurdente.com/en/home-4/) tries to approach the guitar from different angles. Not by adding effects, but rather through finding playing techniques or a compositional approach that increases the musical expression on our instrument. The music of Saturday afternoon's concert, solo or with flute (Duo Alto Plano), tapped into Mediterranean music, and often had a poetic vibe to it.

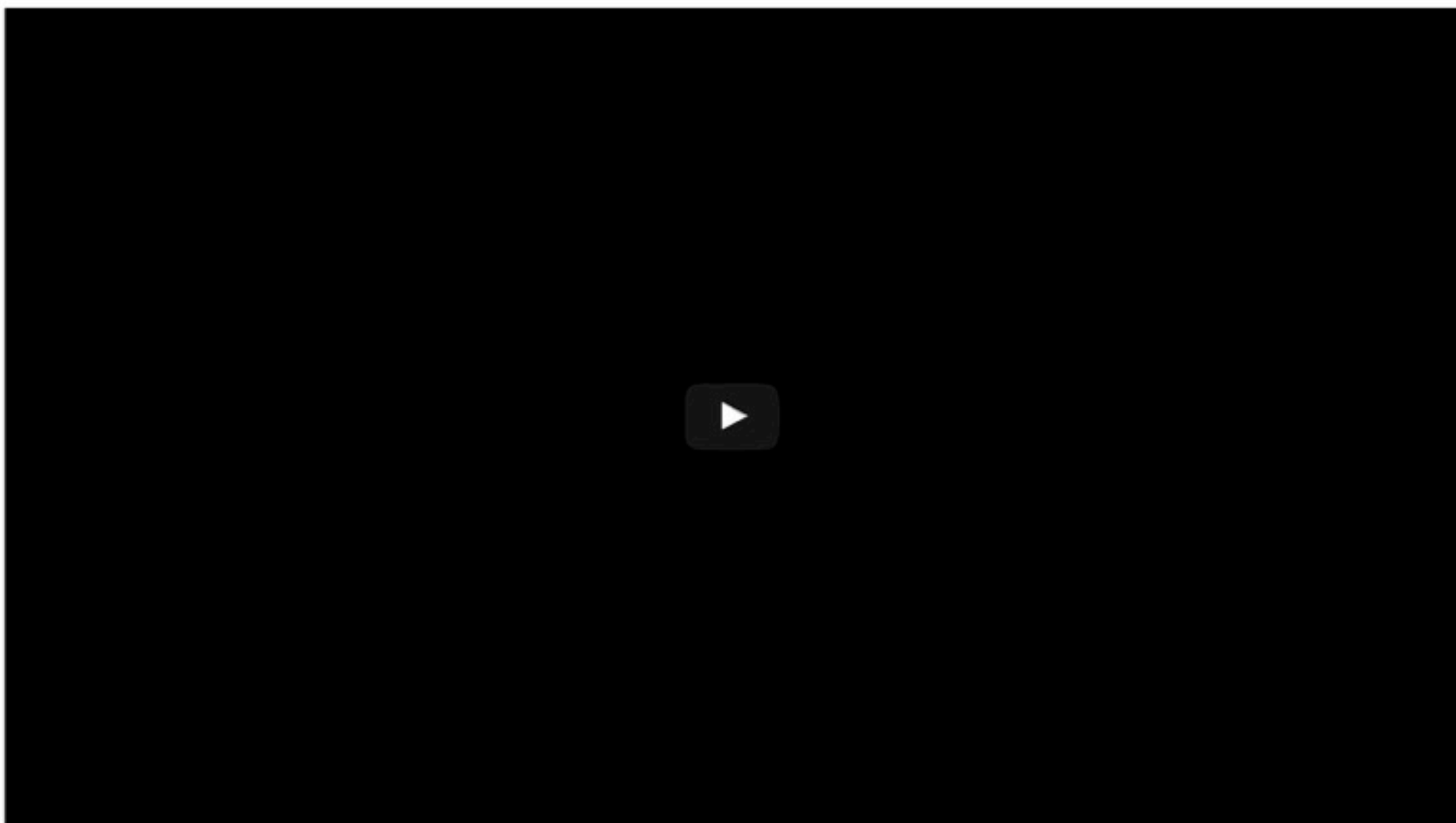
Also on that Saturday, at the Nicole and Herbert Wertheim Performing Arts Center, Özgen conducted the FIU Guitar Orchestra playing music by composers such as John Williams, Albinoni, Granados, Brahms and John Williams. Later, the FIU Jazz Guitar Ensemble and their professor, Thomas Lippincott, joined for some contrast by programming arrangements of music by John Coltrane and Pee Wee Ellis.

On the last day of the festival, participants were encouraged to join the Composers Panel for an open discussion on composition techniques for the guitar. The panelists were composers Fredrick Kaufman, Orlando García Lorca, Mesut Özgen, Federico Bonacossa, Jacob Sudol, Muriel Anderson, and Celso Cano.

Sunday afternoon, composer and guitarist Federico Bonacossa, instructor of Music Theory and Musicology at FIU, took the stage to perform a full program of music

for guitar and live electronics in the "Nylon & Copper" concert, starting with the entertaining *Bee Sting* by Charles Norman Mason. The piece *Quasi Chitarra* by Orlando Jacinto Garcia, written for and premiered by Bonacossa at this festival, makes frequent use of the natural harmonics of the instrument. The compositions by Jacob Sudol, Chen-Hui Jen and Bonacossa himself must have been thoroughly prepared, as extended techniques and alternative tunings were often present in this program. The concert concluded with *Synchronism 10* by Mario Davidovsky, characterized by virtuosic playing that interacted with electronically generated sounds.

[Muriel Anderson \(http://murielanderson.com/\)](http://murielanderson.com/) studied with Christopher Parkening, but is a guitarist that reaches far beyond classical music. On the last day of the festival, we got to hear her "Wonderlust" program, with music by pop songwriters Paul McCartney, Mark Knopfler, and Don McClean, as well as some bluegrass and her own compositions.



Once again, director and founder Mesut Özgen succeeded in opening up the possibilities of a guitar festival and showed the many faces of our beloved instrument to a multicultural audience of Miami. Next year's edition is already slated for February 19–25, 2018 on your calendar. For that event, the MIGF will be celebrating Miami's Cuban heritage by dedicating the festival to Cuban music and inviting renowned Cuban musicians, including maestro Leo Brouwer among many others. A performance competition is also in the making, in addition to the composition competition. So, stay tuned with the upcoming announcements at migf.fiu.edu!

Sam Desmet is a Belgian guitarist who has performed in Europe, Asia and the United States. He studied guitar performance at Florida State University, and music pedagogy at the Royal Conservatory in Belgium.

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